

# ELDER STEW

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For Andrew Thorley

It is a warm, summer’s day in June 1889. A short fat man with a moustache and tightly curled blond hair is enjoying his breakfast in the conservatory of his impressively large stately home. He enjoys eating his breakfast there as it lets him survey his finely manicured gardens at one of his favourite times of the day. A second man dressed in a clean and pressed suit enters the conservatory; it’s his butler. He gets the attention of his employer with a little cough “I’m sorry sir but your gardener needs to speak to you. He says it’s urgent.” The man gives his butler a less than inquisitive look. He casually wipes the crumbs from his moustache and takes a sip of tea from his cup. He clears his throat and speaks “Well I suppose you better show him in then.” The butler leaves and shortly returns with a small, weathered looking man.

“Lord Henry! Lord Henry! I found something untoward!”

“What are you talking about? Don’t tell me you’ve found another mole! I’ve told you before, destroy them!” barked Lord Henry rather impatiently taking another sip of tea.

“It’s not a mole... I found a... I’ve found a...” The gardener lowered his voice, looked at the butler nervously, and then moved in closely to Lord Henry and in a whisper he added “I’ve found a body!”

“How peculiar! Where did you find that?” asked Lord Henry.

“It was by the perimeter of the grounds sir, near a hedge!”

“How very peculiar! How long do you think it’s been there?”

“Well it wasn’t there last night when I knocked off at about 6 o’clock. So between then and about half an hour ago!”

“Good grief! Are you sure he’s dead or is he just dead drunk? We’ve had our fair share of vagrants in the grounds.” said Lord Henry in a matter of fact way whilst looking at his butler who responded with a knowing smile.

“I’m not sure, I didn’t see him moving. He didn’t look very alive.” replied the man slightly panicked.

“I’ll send Grayson to have a look.” said Lord Henry giving a nod to his butler who then left the conservatory. Lord Henry returned his attention to the gardener. “Is that all?”

The gardener looked around the room with a puzzled look on his face “Well yes, I suppose that was all.” Lord Henry beckoned with his head for the gardener to leave but stopped him at the last moment “Before you go, how are the conifers coming along?” The gardener was unsure what to say in the circumstances “Well they’re coming along nicely. Soon they’ll be the talk of the town...” He looked at his employer waiting for a response but it never came. All he got was a raised eyebrow as Lord Henry returned his attention to eating his breakfast. The gardener slunk out of the room a little surprised at how much his employer didn’t bat an eyelid about his gruesome discovery.

A little later on, Lord Henry was finishing up his breakfast when Grayson returned with muddy shoes and a serious look on his face. Lord Henry turned around, looked at Grayson’s shoes and then looked him in the eye “Ah! There you are. So what’s going on then?”

“Well sir, he was right, there is a dead body on the grounds. There’s no sign of any foul play anywhere so I took the liberty of moving him to one of your barns.”

“Quite right. It wouldn’t look too good if someone was to see such a sight in Henry Manor. It would detract away from the gardens. Don’t you think?”

“Yes quite right sir. Did you want me to notify the authorities to take it away?” Grayson asked in a monotonic way.

“How long do you think it will take them to remove it? I’ve got guests tonight and I don’t want any unwanted activity here when I have guests over. It would be social suicide!”

“Well sir, I heard that they once had the same problem at Shipley House and it wasn’t taken care of for a couple of days. If I may sir, may I suggest that maybe we should hold off sending for the police until tomorrow or at least until after your guests have gone?”

“I suppose it won’t do any harm, it’s not as if the gentleman is going to be going anywhere is it? You’re right as always Grayson.”

“Just a thought sir. What about the gardener? He may get a little flustered knowing there is a dead body still on the grounds; you saw how he was earlier! May I suggest that I tell him that the man was just a drunken vagrant and I sent him on his way?” suggested Grayson.

“Do whatever you think is best Grayson; just try to make sure that none of my guests hear about this!”

“Anything you say sir! Is that all for the moment?”

“Yes, thank you. A lot needs doing for tonight; I want everything to be perfect. I’m going to go for a walk; I need to clear my head. All this talk of dead bodies is making me have a strong sense of my own mortality.” Lord Henry took out his pocket watch and looked at it for a moment and appeared to be lost in thought. He spoke “I’ll be back about 11 o’clock for brunch” He looked at Grayson who responded as he always did: “Anything you say sir”. Grayson turned on his heel and left the conservatory.

Lord Henry leant back on his chair deep in thought. After a few moments he got up to change out of his house coat and into his overcoat and boots. He went into his study to grab one of his many pipes and lit it. Nothing could clear his head faster than that of a good pipe. He left his house through the front door and surveyed the horizon. It was as if he was the only person alive. He felt truly blessed. He couldn’t decide which way he wanted to walk so he let his feet decide and they decided to walk east. He looked around the landscape and he saw the conifers that he enquired about earlier. The gardener certainly was right, they really were coming along nicely, he thought to himself.

Before long, Lord Henry was near the perimeter of his grounds. He noticed that part of the hedge had been pushed through. “That must have been where that man must have pushed his way through.” he thought to himself. It looked truly horrible and ruined the look of the rest of the hedge. Lord Henry was not happy about this and got annoyed at his uninvited guest currently lying in state in one of his barns. Under his breath he said “It’s a good job you’re dead otherwise I would be wringing your ruddy neck for what you’ve done to my beloved hedge!” As he said this, the gardener appeared from nowhere. Lord Henry turned around to the gardener “Is this where you found the gentleman?”

“Yes sir. He was about here” answered the gardener as he pointed to a section of the ground.

“He’s ruined my bloody hedge! Can you sort this out somehow before tonight? I want everything to be absolutely perfect!”

“That shouldn’t be a problem sir!” replied the gardener shifting his weight from one foot to the other nervously before he added “I don’t mean to speak out of turn or anything but where is the gentleman?” Lord Henry looked at him for a moment before answering.

“Where is he? Lord knows where the man is! Grayson said he woke the man up and sent him on his way. If the man had any sense he should be making his way to the nearest workhouse!” The gardener looked at him, confused. “But he was definitely dead when I saw him!” Lord Henry was growing more impatient. “Are you trained in medical matters? I thought you were a gardener not Florence Nightingale!” The gardener looked at the ground as Lord Henry continued “Right, you’ve got some jobs to be getting on with and I suggest that you get on with them now, starting off with this massive hole in my hedge. Chop chop!” Lord Henry ordered, adding emphasis to the words “chop chop” by clapping his hands. The gardener walked off with his head hung as Lord Henry tutted and continued with his walk.

Lord Henry loved to walk his grounds. It made him feel as if he was the King of England. He started to whistle the English national anthem, it always lifted his spirits. Before he knew where he was, he was standing outside one of his barns. With curiosity taking over him; he opened the door and walked in. At the back of the barn in a dark corner was what he guessed was the dead gentleman. Grayson had covered it with an old Hessian sack. Lord Henry slowly walked over to it to see if it was what he thought it was. He pulled back the sack and uncovered the man's face. It startled him slightly as he was half expecting to see something else. It suddenly hit him that he was standing next to the body of a man who had breathed his last. In all of his privileged life he had never actually seen a dead body and he was surprised at just how much it didn't bother him. For some reason, he spoke to the man. "So you're the gentleman who has ruined my hedge... Not a lot I can do about it now I suppose... You've picked a lovely place to pass on..." Lord Henry stood there for a moment in silence as if he was waiting for a response from the dead man. The longer he stood there the more uneasy he felt. After standing there for a moment or so, he heard movement outside. Quickly he covered the dead man up again and walked out of the barn. It was Grayson.

"Oh hello Grayson! What are you doing here? I was just... I was just..." Grayson stopped Lord Henry in his tracks; it was not his job to have his employer explain to him what he's doing. "I have some unfortunate news sir. I've just been told that the mangosteen fruit that you imported at great expense from the Middle East has gone missing and cannot be found anywhere."

"Sorry? What? My mangosteen is gone? That was supposed to be the pièce de résistance for the evening. My mangosteen was the talk of the town! What have I got now? Just gelatine! Everybody has gelatine these days. How will my dinner party be remembered now?" barked Lord Henry, working himself into a lather.

"Well sir, I suppose I could postpone tonight's event and perhaps see if I can get hold of another mangosteen for you!"

"I'm not made of money Grayson. I paid through the nose for one fruit and I'm sure as Hell not going to be paying for another one. I hope that whoever took my beloved fruit enjoyed it, it cost enough!"

"Did you want me to postpone tonight sir?"

"I can't do that. Nobody postpones a night of merriment this close to the night itself, we'll just have to think of something! Maybe get some expensive sweets or something like that." Lord Henry wiped his brow. It was usually under these circumstances that he got one of his bad heads "I think I'm going to have to have a bit of a lay down, I can feel one of my heads coming on." Grayson looked at Lord Henry "What time shall I wake you up sir?"

"Oh, this afternoon some time. How about just before afternoon tea? I'll have to skip brunch and lunch. I want everything to be perfect tonight and I don't want a bad head ruining my enjoyment!"

"Anything you say sir and rest assured I will sort this all out." Grayson said as Lord Henry started to walk back to his house. Lord Henry turned around and spoke "I don't know what I would do without you Grayson. Thank you!" Grayson cleared the little lump that had developed in his throat from his master's kind words. "Thank you sir, you can rely on me!" Grayson stood there and watched as Lord Henry disappeared out of sight.

A few hours later, Grayson was awakening his master from his slumbers "Wakey wakey. It's time to wake up sir." he said as he gently shook Lord Henry. Lord Henry woke up; confused. "What... What? What time is it?"

"It's just after 2 o'clock sir. We'll be having afternoon tea shortly. All the sandwiches and cakes are all laid out and they are impatiently waiting to be devoured!" said Grayson. Lord Henry sat up and looked at Grayson. "You're in a rather impish mood this afternoon Grayson. I take it preparations for tonight are going well." A wry smile slowly wandered across the face of Grayson. "Yes sir, everything is going splendidly. I've worked out our little problem with the mangosteen" He looked at Lord Henry who looked excited "I've not been able to find a replacement for the fruit; those things are rarer than the proverbial hen's teeth sir. Instead I've organised a little something that will surely take your guests breath away and this evening will be one that your guests will never forget as long as they live!"

"Grayson, you are outstanding! I've said it before and I'll say it again, but I don't know quite what I would do without you! Do tell, what have you got up your sleeve for this evening?" Lord Henry enquired. Grayson sat down at the end of Lord Henry's bed "Well sir, I have sorted out for you and your guests a truly exotic experience. I have managed to locally source a delicacy that is enjoyed in the Southern Hemisphere. A traditional dish from New Guinea that I am certain you and your guests have never experienced before!"

"Good heavens Grayson, you do work quickly!"

"I try my best sir."

"That you do dear Grayson! So where did you manage to pick up this delicacy?"

"I managed to get it from the nearby town." Grayson said to Lord Henry who suddenly looked a little deflated. "What's wrong sir?" Grayson asked him.

"Is it those pineapple bonbons from that sweet shop? I've heard that they taste absolutely ghastly!" said Lord Henry looking at his hands.

"No sir, it most certainly is not those horrid pineapple bonbons from that sweet shop. Their reputation has already preceded them. What I've prepared is a dish that I hear they call Elder stew. They eat it at times of celebration and they believe that eating it will give you great intellect."

"My my Grayson you certainly know your stuff. Where on earth did you hear about it?"

"Well sir, I read about it in a book and have always been interested in it and since you want tonight to be a very special night I thought I'd see about getting it sorted out for your dinner party."

"Fantastic! Tonight shall be the talk of the town!" Lord Henry bounded out of bed and put on his house coat. He paced around his bedroom like an excited child "Tonight I'll show them how a dinner party is supposed to be. Over the years I've been to some frightfully boring soirées. It's always the same people, talking about the same things, eating the same foods but tonight is the night that this will change. Today my close friends will eat Elder stew and I will be crowned as the master of dinner parties!" Lord Henry had a broad grin on his face as he stood there for a moment silently lost in thought. Grayson cleared his throat "Sorry to interrupt your daydreaming sir but your afternoon tea is sure to spoil if it is left any longer." Lord Henry snapped out of his thoughts in an instant. "Quite right! I'll be down in a moment, I need to dress!"

Grayson left Lord Henry to get dressed and walked down to the conservatory where the kitchen staff had laid out the afternoon tea. Grayson perused the table and straightened things up just in time for Lord Henry to join him. In his haste, Lord Henry had forgotten to tuck in his shirt and his cuffs were without cufflinks. "I say Grayson! This is a splendid spread!" he said as he smartened himself up. There were cucumber sandwiches, a pot of tea and a fine array of freshly made cream cakes. "I say Grayson, you've worked very hard today and there is quite a lot of food here. Did you want to join me?" Grayson was taken aback by this suggestion as Lord Henry had never asked this of him before. "Well sir, thank you for your very kind offer but I'm going to have to decline. It wouldn't be good form for me to do so."

"Come on; just have a cream cake and one cup of tea."

"You're very gracious sir but I'm really not sure if I have the time to join you. I have got a lot to be getting on with and I'm worried that if I leave the cook too long she's bound to mess up the Elder stew. Thank you again sir."

"I understand perfectly well. She does get easily distracted these days. I do wonder if it's time I put the old girl out to pasture! At least take a cake with you to keep your strength up!" Grayson smiled and reached out for a cream filled horn. He held it up to Lord Henry with a smile then thanked him with a nod of his head. "Is that all for the moment sir?" he asked clutching the pastry in his right hand. "Yes that is all" Lord Henry replied as he took a bite out of a cream bun, Grayson started walking out of the conservatory as Lord Henry spoke, spitting bits of cream and cake everywhere "Actually there is one last thing before you go," he said whilst wiping his mouth "Can you send for the gardener. I want to know how he's getting on with that blasted hedge!" With another nod Grayson left the conservatory.

Lord Henry sat there enjoying his afternoon tea as he saw the gardener walking towards the conservatory. He took a big swig of tea and got up to meet the gardener at the French windows.

"How's the reconstruction of the hedge going?" He asked.

"I've sorted the hedge out. It looks almost as good as new." replied the gardener.

"Excellent! Are the conifers still shaping up nicely?"

"Yes, yes they are." answered the gardener who clearly had something on his mind "Lord Henry, about the man earlier, I'm sorry I questioned you about it, it's just he really didn't look alive to me. I'm sorry if I caused you any unnecessary worry earlier."

"That's quite all right. To the untrained eye, sometimes an unconscious drunk can look a bit dead." Lord Henry said with a forced smile.

"I think he must have sobered up now, I saw him earlier. He looked a bit lost. I sent him on his way again as he'd already caused you enough trouble and I thought that if you saw him about the place again you'd surely get quite cross with him. I don't think he spoke any of the Queen's English but he got the sentiment." Lord Henry looked at the gardener, unsure as to what to say. He himself had seen the man; he was very dead when he saw him. "Are you sure it was definitely him?" Lord Henry asked, suddenly

feeling another one of his bad head pain coming on.

"Well I cannot be totally sure but if it wasn't him, he's got a twin walking about!" said the gardener with a bit of a laugh. Lord Henry joined him with a nervous laugh.

"Have you got much more to do today?" Lord Henry asked, trying to change the subject.

"I've sorted the hedge and I've just got a little bit more clipping to do on the conifers then just a bit of watering." said the gardener. Lord Henry wasn't really listening.

"Tell you what, you've worked very hard today, I'm sure thing are all perfect as they are, take the rest of the day off!" The gardener looked at Lord Henry "Are you sure sir? That would be gratefully received. Thank you very much sir" the gardener responded. Lord Henry gave him a weak smile "I'll be seeing you tomorrow then!" said Lord Henry quietly lost in thought. The gardener walked off as Lord Henry sat back down at the table. He sat there for a little while trying to digest what the gardener had said. He thought to himself that the man was definitely dead, not half dead, dead dead! It's true that he had never seen a dead body before but he was sure that he had now. Maybe the man had a twin and he was out looking for him. He started to feel his head hurting. There's only one way to know what was going on and that was to check the barn.

Lord Henry got up from the table and left the conservatory to check on the man. As he walked over to the barn, he was deep in thought. Things today had been a bit strange and hectic and there was surely some sort of plausible explanation for it all, it's just at this moment in time it didn't make any sense. He saw the barn and the door was open. He froze. He was unsure what to think. Maybe the man wasn't dead and was in fact just dead drunk. He walked towards the barn cautiously, listening out for any movement. He heard nothing but birds singing. He got to the barn and popped his head in. He looked at the Hessian sack. It had moved. It wasn't where it was before. It was now on top of nothing. Lord Henry entered the barn to have a more thorough look around but it was empty. The man had gone. He must have woken up and left. Lord Henry was quite unsure what to think. He no longer had a dead body lying in his barn but he was so certain that the man was dead. He stroked his chin and stood there in shock.

"Today is certainly one of those days" he said to himself. He left the barn and went to look for Grayson.

When Lord Henry had found Grayson he saw him talking to the gardener, from where he was standing he could hear that they were having a bit of a heated discussion.

"Lord Henry said I was allowed to leave off early!" said the gardener.

"Not until you've sorted that hedge out!" retaliated Grayson.

"It is all sorted out. I'm allowed to leave off early!"

Lord Henry walked over to the two men "What's all this about?" he asked. Grayson stepped forward towards Lord Henry "He's saying that you've let him have the rest of the day off."

"Yes, that's right. He's done all the things he needs to do so I thought I'd let him go early" Lord Henry answered.

"Oh. Well he still needs to sort out the conifers!" said Grayson.

"No no, they're fine as they are!" Lord Henry turned to the gardener "I'll see you first thing tomorrow morning." The gardener nodded at him and walked away.

Grayson spoke "He hasn't finished the conifers; they're still quite shabby around the tops!" Lord Henry hesitated for a moment and looked in the direction of the barn. "I say Grayson, the man in the barn; he's gone!"

"It seems our problem is solved!" said Grayson with a smile.

"Yes I suppose it is, but when I had a look at him, he was definitely dead. Is it possible that he came back to life?" He looked at Grayson, waiting for him to answer.

"He came back from the dead and then left?" questioned Grayson.

"Yes, exactly, you hear these stories of people getting buried alive and all. Is it any wonder? He definitely looked dead to me."

"People don't come back to life after they've died. They're dead." laughed Grayson. Lord Henry smiled weakly "I suppose you're right. It's certainly a turn up for the books. At least now the man is gone and we don't have to worry about that any more. Still, I think I need a bit of a lay down before my guests arrive. How's the Elder Stew coming along?"

"It's coming along very well indeed. It shall be the highlight of the evening!"

"Wonderful! I couldn't bear to hear of another catastrophe today. I've had my fill of them. I'm going to have a lay down before I get ready for my guests to arrive. I'm going to leave everything for this evening in your very capable hands Grayson"

"Very good sir" replied Grayson with a little smile as Lord Henry walked away.

In a dimly lit dining room, a clock strikes 8 o'clock. Lord Henry's little get together is in full swing. Around the table are some of his closest friends. There's the renown traveller John Bantam and his fiancé Chloe, a local business man Charles Unwin and his wife Diane, a shop owner called Sidney Hedges and his wife Francis and Lord Henry's sister Elizabeth Smith and her husband Albert Smith. Their spirits are all high as there has been liquor and champagne flowing freely throughout the evening.

"I say old chap when are we going to get to sample some of that delightful mangosteen you've been talking about all this time?" asked John Bantam. Lord Henry laughed nervously "I'm afraid the mangosteen is off. It has somehow been misplaced, probably in someone's mouth. I'm so sorry!" There was a quiet groan around the table. Charles Unwin spoke "I was so looking forward to it. I had heard that Queen Victoria herself has offered to pay £100 to anyone who could get her one."

"I know, I know." said Lord Henry "I know it's a bit of a disappointment but rest assured I've organised something that is just as exclusive as that fruit, something that even Queen Victoria hasn't been able to sample." There was a little ripple of excitement around the table. Lord Henry picked up a little bell that was next to him and rang it. Moments later, Grayson walked in with his head bowed slightly. "Is everything all right sir?" he asked in a quiet tone.

"Yes everything is fine, Grayson. I think we are now ready for..." Lord Henry paused for a moment and raised his voice slightly so that the rest of the table could hear him "we are now ready for the ELDER STEW." Lord Henry smiled to himself as the ripple of excitement returned around the table once again. Grayson smiled and left the dining room.

"I say, what is Elder Stew?" asked his sister Elizabeth. Lord Henry raised his voice once more to make sure that everyone could hear him "It's a dish that's served in the Southern Hemisphere. I believe New Guinea, it's a celebratory dish that's supposed to boost intellect" Lord Henry said, trying to remember everything that Grayson had told him earlier.

"Oh it sounds wonderful brother! What is in it?" his sister asked him. Lord Henry sat there for a moment, realising that he actually had no idea "Well.. erm... there are many different variations around the world. I've had it a few times now and it always made a bit differently." lied Lord Henry. Charles Unwin piped up "Well it sounds truly remarkable and a real treat for us all! What was in it when you had it?" Lord Henry floundered for a moment as he tried to do some serious guess work "Well it's a stew..." he looked around the table and everyone was sitting there smiling at him "There's onions and carrots in it... erm... and six different kinds of meat in it that complement each other exceedingly well." Lord Henry gulped a little. Sidney Hedges decided it was time for him to speak "Six different kinds of meat? Where did you get them from, you certainly didn't get them from my shop!" Lord Henry looked at him for a moment, a little unsure what to say. His sister noticed that Lord Henry looked a little uncomfortable "I'm sure that he probably got some of the animals from his own grounds and to be fair it's not as if you even stock that many different varieties of beast!" she said with a smile, all the table apart from Sidney Hedges laughed.

A moment later, Grayson came through carrying a large silver tray with nine small bowls of hot, steaming Elder stew. He rested the tray on a side table and proceeded to place the bowls in front of Lord Henry and his guests. "Ah Elder stew! Thanks Grayson, tell the cook she has surpassed herself tonight! This smells like the best Elder stew she's ever prepared!" Grayson looked at Lord Henry and Lord Henry looked at Grayson with a look that asked for him to back him up "I will tell her sir!" He nodded and left the dining room to let the dinner party to continue. They all sat around smelling the steaming stew in front of them. Lord Henry looked into his bowl and was greeted by a thick grey soup with chunks of undistinguishable meat floating in it.

"My my, I've never smelt anything like this ever!" said Elizabeth. They all took another sniff.

"It smells quite gamey" said Sidney Hedges.

"Does this have fish in it too?" asked Charles Unwin.

"Well..." said Lord Henry as he took a spoonful of the stew and smelt it "I think there is some salmon in there and..." he took another sniff "Definitely some pheasant." He then took a little sip of it and was greeted by an intriguing taste that he had never experienced before that had a strong aftertaste that was on the whole, not displeasing to his taste buds "I think there's also some pork in there too" He then put the rest of the spoon in his mouth and swallowed it, it truly was a flavour he had never experienced before. The rest of the table joined him in eating the stew. There was silence as they all consumed the stew. The silence was occasionally broken when someone tried to guess what else was in it.

"So we're all agreed that it's got pheasant, salmon, pork and beef in it. Come on Lord Henry, spill the beans, what is in this delightful stew?" asked Charles Unwin to a

reception of "hear hear" around the table. Lord Henry rang his bell again and waited for Grayson to appear, a moment or so later he entered the dining room. Lord Henry beckoned to Grayson to come closer as he whispered into Grayson's ear "Say dear Grayson what is in this stew? I can't quite put my finger on it." Grayson stood upright and spoke in a steady voice "Sir, the cook needs to have a quick word with you if you've got a moment!" Lord Henry looked at him with a puzzled look on his face. "What are you talking about Grayson? I've got guests I cannot leave them. If the cook wants to speak to me, I suggest she comes out here and besides that we all want to compliment her about her fine interpretation of Elder Stew." Grayson smiled as he surveyed the room, he leant in close to Lord Henry and whispered quietly to him "Yes sir, it's about that, I need to talk to you about that and I'd prefer if I could speak to you privately for a moment." Grayson stood up again waiting for Lord Henry's reaction. Lord Henry scrunched up his napkin and threw it onto the table and then addressed his guests "I won't be a moment; I just need to have a quick consultation with Grayson." He got up and left the dining room as the speculation about the stew continued.

A few minutes later, Lord Henry came back ashen faced. He sat down and poured himself a glass of champagne that he downed in a couple of large gulps. Silence fell over the dinner table. Lord Henry's sister broke the silence "I say brother, whatever is the matter?" Lord Henry sat there for a moment and poured himself another glass of champagne, drank half of it and then stood up. "It seems we were a little off when it came to guessing what was in the stew. There isn't any pheasant, salmon, pork, beef or whatever in it. How can I put this? The main ingredient is... well... what the French call 'cadavre'"

Silence fell over the room as they just digested this piece of information. John Bantam cleared his throat "So are you trying to tell us that we've just eaten man?" Silence reigned over the table as Lord Henry nodded. John Bantam continued "I say old boy, this really is something else. You've invited us all over to your house and then feed us human!"

"Well, it's a strange story really. In a nutshell, there was a dead vagrant on my grounds this morning and Grayson decided to cook him up for dinner after my mangosteen had gone missing. He wanted to make tonight memorable and I guess, well, he has made it that. My apologies to you all." Lord Henry got up from the table to leave. John Bantam got up and spoke "Now listen here. It's certainly not the done thing to feed human to your friends and family without telling them beforehand, especially when it's been prepared in such an exquisite way!" John Bantam looked around the table to see the reaction of the people around it. They all looked at each other trying to make head or tail of what was going on. After a few tense moments Sidney Hedges stood up "No wonder you didn't come to my shop for your meat. I certainly don't stock that, which is a shame as it's quite possibly one of the tastiest meats I have ever had the privilege to sample. I say friend, is there any more of this Elders stew left?" Everyone's attention was now focussed on Lord Henry's ashen face as he reached for his bell once again to ring it. Moments later Grayson appeared and the table stood up and applauded him. Lord Henry spoke to Grayson "Is there any more Elder stew? My guests would like another helping." Grayson replied "Your wish is my command sir" and he turned to return to the kitchen. As he was leaving Lord Henry grabbed Grayson's elbow and whispered in his ear "It was a bold move there Grayson, luckily it paid off but next time you plan on feeding my guests and I dead tramp, I suggest you tell me first!"

Grayson smiled and said "As you wish sir!" as he left the dining room to get more Elder Stew.